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HERVARAR SAGA OK HEIÐREKS KONUNGS REVISITED

Nobody will ever know exactly when and where the original legend of Hervör was told for the first time - but according to Henrik Schück it was the legend of a mother who does her utmost to protect one of her two sons in delivering a cursed sword to him, thus unwillingly causing the death of the second one. To Schück (1918:54-55) it seemed quite obvious that this legend arose soon after the migration period among gothic-speaking people in the south of Russia, further that the development of the saga proper took place in the Nordic traders' quarters in Novgorod in the Viking period. For some reason or another Schück did not mention Kiev in his ingenious Studier i Hervararsagan. From whatever place in southern Russia the legend may originate, there must have been people at the court of Kiev who knew it - perhaps with some additions already. After all it was Kiev, even spiritually, that was the shining capital of ancient Russia, until the hordes of Djengis-khan put an end to its glory towards the middle of the 13th century. Referring to a detailed account of the political relations during the Varangian period given by Braun (1924:esp.155-56), Briem stated in a paper on Germanische und russische Helden-dichtung from 1929: "An den russischen Fürstenhöfen - vor allem in Kijew - war das germanische, skandinavische Element bis zum Ende des XI. Jahrhunderts stark vertreten, und sicher wurden da auch im Kreise der warägischen Dienstmannen Lieder und Sagen in nordischer Sprache vorgetragen." (1929:348) So perhaps we get back to Kiev later.

We now turn to Hervarar saga ok Heiðreks konungs as actually preserved in a number of manuscripts. As you will understand, I cannot here and now account for all of them in detail. Three different versions can be distinguished, mainly represented by

the manuscripts R, U and H. Scholars in the field nowadays tend to favour R (Gl.kgl.sml. 2845,4^o, Copenhagen), which was written in the early fifteenth century (Jón Helgason 1967:150). But not only does R give a much shorter, more clearcut and thus more "classical" introduction than U does, R ends after only a few stanzas of Hlöðskviða. So roughly three quarters of this lay are missing in R. U, mainly represented by a manuscript from the 17th century (R:715, Uppsala), is the only version containing the entire Hlöðskviða. Moreover, it has the fuller, less classical beginning of the saga and an important genealogy of the kings of Sweden attached to the end of it. Finally we have H, Hauksbók (AM 544,4^o), written soon after 1300 and thus the oldest but certainly not the best manuscript. The text ends even earlier than in R, and the plot is blurred by abridgments and by unlucky attempts to combine incompatible accounts. The whole of Hjalmar's Death-Song is skipped. Nevertheless we have good reason to be grateful for the queer combinations found in H, since they bear witness to two written and partly contradictory versions of Hervarar saga in the thirteenth century.

In the thirteenth-century prose text we find four major blocks of poetry, all of which have been edited and commented separately more than once. All of them are recognized as remarkable examples of Old Norse poetry, although for quite different reasons.

Following the text of Hervarar saga, the first block of poetry we come across is The Death-Song of Hjalmar. This poem is not complete in itself, no clue being given as to the time or place where or the reason why the hero is wounded. It is therefore considered to have been accompanied by some sort of prose narrative already long before it was inserted into Hervarar saga (Tolkien 1960:XII, Lönnroth 1971:18). Felix Genzmer, who evaluated the poem together with the verses inserted into the saga before the battle of Sámsey, decided to call it "ein prosadurchsetztes Sagenteillied" (1948:19-20). To treat all the stanzas related to the battle on Sámsey as one block of poetry, seems justified inasmuch as the same block, with essentially the same content, but rendered in a

considerably greater number of stanzas, is found in Urvar-Odds saga. The poem behind these two versions has been ascribed to a variety of centuries, the extremes being the 6th century (Birger Nerman 1957:32, 1971:21) and the 13th century, the last being repeated only recently in Simek/Pálsson's Lexikon der altnordischen Literatur (1987:168). Based on the observation stated in many places that the content of the poem is reflected in the fifth book of the Gesta Danorum by Saxo Grammaticus (born about 1150), I hold that the proposal in Eddica Minora (p.XLIII: "spätestens gegen Ausgang des 12.Jhs.") is too vague to be of much value any more. As a matter of fact, it is outdated by the conclusion at which Lars Lönnroth arrived in 1971: "we can safely deduce that it was a genuine part of oral tradition at least as early as in the 12th century" (1971:19).

Hjálmar, the dying hero from Sweden, gives a vivid account not only of his present situation, but also of the happiness he left behind at the court of his homeland. Commenting on certain features of Indo-European oral tradition, Peter Buchholz pointed out that according to Old Norse and Persian sources heroes often made verses on their own great deeds, either immediately after these had been performed, or at a later stage of their life, in order to make sure that their achievements were told in the right way after their death (1980: 29). Since much has been said about the oral tradition behind the Sámsey poetry, it occurs to me as worth mentioning, that at least Hjálmar shows no eagerness to produce what we might call an "autorisierte Version der eigenen Taten". All the pictures creeping up in Hjálmar's memory are peaceful pictures in bright colours. The only stanza of the poem where Hjálmar to some extent boasts of dying as a hero instead of taking to his heels is not found in Hervarar saga, but only in Urvar-Odds saga:

Fregna eigi þat á fold konur,
at ek fyr höggum hlífask léta...

The most appropriate characterization of the lay is consequently that of a specimen of elegiac poetry. Discussing poetry in a certain saga, I must remind you, however, that not one single line of all the verses pertaining to the battle on

Sámsey is found in Hauksbók. As soon as Angantyr and his brother have arrived on Sámsey and start looking for Hjalmar, Haukr continues: "ok fara þeira skipti sva, sem greinir i Orvaroddz sogu" - and then tells us in less than eight lines the whole story including the death of the King's daughter at Uppsala.

After the battle, the sword Tyrfing was buried together with its owner, Angantyr. As time passes, his daughter Hervör grows up to be an energetic, handsome young woman. Disguised as a man, she finally sets out to Sámsey, intent on getting hold of the famous weapon. At this point we find the second block of verses. Roughly three quarters of the verses usually referred to as Hervararkviða contain a dialogue between Hervör and her dead father at the edge of, and later in, the burial mound. That is, why this group of stanzas even goes under the name of The Waking of Angantyr. Angantyr is reluctant to hand over the cursed sword to her and warns her twice, "trust what I tell you, Tyrfing, daughter, shall be the ruin and end of all your family"(Tolkien). At last, when he can resist her claim to the weapon no longer, he warns her of its poisoned edges and advises her to hide it well. She gets the Tyrfing and leaves Sámsey. Strangely enough, after having struggled intensely to get it, Hervör does not make use of the Tyrfing very much: The only man slain by her with the renowned sword is slain so to speak by chance. He is a man without a name at the court of king Gudmund.

The story underlying the lay of Hervör seems to be of Norwegian provenance. This is supported not only by the names of the men surrounding the heroine, but also by her remark (about the Tyrfing): "I count it dearer than were all Norway beneath my hand"(Tolkien). The informations given about the places where Hervör lived in Norway, however, are obscure.

"The Waking of Angantyr is unquestionably older than the saga," Tolkien says (1960:XI), "how much older, I cannot say." How much - this depends on the dating of the saga as a whole, a question not settled so far. Until evidence is given for something else, we cannot very well go further back than the 12th century, especially when all the purported or real reminiscences to other pieces of heroic poetry are considered.

Comments are made about the beauty of Hervararkviða, about the impressive wording of the poem, but as far as I know, no one has ever brought into focus how extremely well-suited it is to scenic presentation. As a matter of fact Hervararkviða may be called a play in miniature - about the uselessness of admonishing young people, since there is no way to teach them experience, they will not believe you.

Hervör was married to Höfundr and they had two sons, Angantyr and Heidrekr. After Heidrekr has slain his brother, he is sentenced to leave the country, equipped with a handful of good counsels from his father and with the Tyrping from his mother. The good counsels, I can mention here only in passing. Knut Liestøl (1924:92-94) called attention to two close parallels to the good counsels in Hervarar saga, one in the Livre du chevalier de la Tour Landry from 1371-72 and another one in the Trattato dell'ingratitude e di molti essempli d'essa in a manuscript from the 15th century. Close parallels are always of interest, but in this case we must not forget the fact that these two sources are much too late to tell us anything as to when and where the good counsels were incorporated in Hervarar saga. As to the provenance of the motif of the good counsels a more fruitful approach seems to be that of Schück in his comment on the parallel in Ruotlieb (1918:54):

Ett dylikt motiv är ju visserligen mycket allmänt, men det erinrar onekligen mest om orienten (Pantschatantra, Disciplina clericalis m.m.), och man vill därför gärna tänka sig, att det i Tyskland och i nordén lånats från österlandet - på bägge hållen särskildt för sig, i Sydtysskland genom de förbindelser, som man redan före korstågen hade med Byzans och orienten, i nordén genom de svenska köpmännens handelsfärder till Bosporen.

Heidrekr won the kingdom of Reidgotaland and married three times. He had one child, Angantyr, together with his first wife, and another, Hervör, with his third wife. His second marriage was childless. In between there was another woman in Heidreks life. After a foray into Húnaland he made Sifka, the king's daughter, his mistress. His son by Sifka, Hlöðr, is brought up by Sifka's father, King Humli. Sifka, at a later stage once again visiting Heidrekr, is drowned by him in a river. After a sufficient number of years in power and weary of the quest for unusual experiences Heidrekr becomes a wise man, intent on reconciliation even with

his enemies in his own country. This leads to the riddle-contest with Gestumblindi, the third block of poetry in Hervarar saga. This very special type of conversation is handed down entirely in verse in some of the manuscripts (cfr. Jón Helgason 1924: LXXXVI-LXXXVII), whereas in others, generally assumed to be the better ones, only the riddles themselves are in verse and the answers in prose. Moreover, there are more riddles (7 extra) in Hauksbók than in the remaining redactions of the saga. Anne Holtmark called Hervarar saga a good example of the loose structure of the fornaldarsögur, "a story-teller is free to add or subtract" (1965:19). And as we see here once more, at least in Hervarar saga, this is true for the verses as well as for the prose paragraphs.

The Riddles of Gestumblindi - or Heidreks gátur - form a heterogeneous collection, most of them being written in ljóðaháttir and the rest in fornyrðislag. As a whole they remind one of Vafþrúðnismál, as far as the presentation is concerned, the frame in both cases being a contest with Odin as a guest in disguise. The riddles are all heathen, none of their subjects can be related to Christian ideas and none of their subjects comes from outside Scandinavia. The Riddles of Gestumblindi have the reputation of being unique in that there are no other collections of riddles proper in Old Norse. Even when compared with sources in other Old Germanic languages, the riddles of Gestumblindi appear to be unique, since there are no collections with approximately the same choice of subjects or in a similar meter.

In Hervarar saga Gestumblindi is Odin, disguised as one of his worshippers. It is in this form, that he meets the king, and Heidrek, accordingly, believes he knows with whom he is talking. Since the name Gestumblindi otherwise is known only from a Swedish legend, it has been argued that the frame of the episode is likely to originate from that country. The riddle-contest as a whole, however, is generally considered to be the last section that was inserted into Hervarar saga, and it has been said more than once that this may very well have occurred in Iceland. As to the time, when the riddles were inserted: According to Elias Wessén it was probably in the 12th century. (1924:538)

After Heidreks death 'undir Harvadafjöllum' (probably the Carpathians), a feud about his inheritance breaks out between Angantyr and the bastard Hlöðr. This leads to an immense battle between the Goths and the Huns, and it is here, at the end of the saga, that we find the fourth block of poetry, Hlöðskviða. This famous heroic lay, definitely among the oldest ones preserved in the North, consists of - depending on which edition you prefer - 32 or 34 stanzas or fragments of stanzas and some connecting lines in prose.

The legend must have been known in Western Europe fairly early, since it is reflected in Widsith, generally ascribed to the late seventh century. In this renowned Old English poem, mention is made of five persons involved: Heaþoric, Sifeca, Hlīpe, Incgenþow, Wyrnhere (corresponding to Heidrekr, Sifka, Hlöðr, Angantyr, Ormarr), and it is told, that the Hrædas (=Goths) had to defend their country from Ætlan leode (the Huns). From the early Middle Ages we have two sources showing that the legend was known in the North at that time. Háttalykill hinn forni (about 1140) includes two verses about Angantyr and Hlöðr and a conflict concerning land between them. The second source is a story from about 1200 told by Saxo Grammaticus in the fifth book of his Gesta Danorum. The characters in Saxo's story have different names and the reason for their enmity is different, but the preparations for the big battle, the battle itself and its outcome, the downfall of the Huns, give strong indications of what his model must have been like. Since even the battle on Sámsey is reflected in the story told by Saxo, this suggests that at least these two legends were combined already in the 12th century. For the most recent example of support given to this view, see Inge Skovgaard-Petersen's discussion of sources or rather literary models for the fifth book of the Gesta Danorum (1987:42-44).

Numerous attempts have been made to identify the historical event underlying the legend of the battle of the Goths and the Huns, but none has proved convincing in the long run. After examining all the solutions to the problem offered so far, Christopher Tolkien realized that the battle might have taken place at almost any time in the fourth century (1955-56:156-58).

As to the location of the feud we are given three clues in the text, the first one being the death of King Heidrek "und Harvadafjöllum", generally accepted as meaning "beneath the Carpathians." Two places are mentioned as being situated "on the banks of the Dnieper": Arheimar, where Angantyr held the funeral feast for his father, and "Steinn inn fagri", part of which Hlöðr wanted to possess, obviously a stone of great importance to the Goths, some sort of a monument, an offer-place or a minor fortress (cfr. Kleiber in *Maal og Minne* 1969). Even if "á Dúnheidi", the third one, in the description of the battle-field, really does mean "on the Danube-heath" or "on the plain of the Danube", as most scholars in the field nowadays believe, we are thus lead, primarily, to the Gothic realms on the Northern shores of the Black Sea. After the last two decades' thorough studies in the relations between the vikings and that part of the world (Hilda R. Davidson, Herbert Jankuhn) it is beyond doubt, that this legend must have been known in Kiev. Moreover the poem was, even if it was composed in the North, presumably composed by a man, who had been in Kiev at some time, since details occur, which have no parallels in the North and which point into that direction, as "basmir" in stanza 31: The word occurs nowhere else in Old Norse literature, but seems to be the same as ukrainean "basma", which means 'black silkscarf', bulgarian and serbokroatean "basma", all traceable to the same turkish word, meaning 'printed linnen'. Einar Ol. Sveinsson, who called attention to these parallels (1958:249-51), saw no reason to consider this word in Hlöðskviða being a loan from the ukrainean language, since - as he put it - the Varangians had plenty of occasions to learn it from the turkish people, whom they met in many places at that time. This reinforces our impression based on observations, which have been stated already, that the lay is likely to be composed in the tenth or early eleventh century. This brings us to the days of Vladimir the Great and to the reign of King Yaroslav of Kiev with the swedish princess Ingigerd at his side. From roughly 1080 onwards many renowned people from the North stayed at the court of these russian kings for some time, all of them capable of transferring the legend of Hervör to Scandinavia, and among them more than

one capable of composing a poem like Hlödskvida. Unfortunately I have not the time to discuss them one by one.

We now turn to the question when the Old Norse Hervarar saga is likely to have taken shape. From the facts mentioned earlier in this paper, it is only sensible to deduct, that the interest for the story was greatest in Sweden, taken into consideration, that Angantyr is said to be the ancestor of the Swedish kings. Besides, in revisiting the four blocks of poetry in the saga we found things of interest pointing to Sweden both in the so-called Sámsey-poetry and in the Riddles of Gestumblindi. The riddles, which make the youngest layer of poetry in the saga, may - partly or all of them - originate from Iceland, but the name of Gestumblindi is Swedish, so he was in all probability in the saga, before it was brought to Iceland, although his part at that time may have been shorter or different from what we find in our manuscripts. And Hjálmars Death-Song is clearly based on a Swedish legend.

Looking for a place and the time when Hervarar saga as a whole was worked out, we get - in my opinion - a broad hint in the kings' genealogy which is attached to Hervarar saga. Genealogies at the end of mediaeval books are not unusual, and as a rule they contain a record of persons down to the time, when the writer was at work, the last person mentioned now and then being the same, who ordered the book. Schück observed fairly early (1896:217-19) that the last king mentioned in our record is Philippus, who died in 1118. Nothing is said about the death of King Ingi the younger (1125), so he was probably still alive; Schück concluded, that the genealogy was likely to be written round about 1120 and attributed it to Ari inn fróði Þorgilsson, underlining that the chronicle obviously first had been added to the saga at a later stage, that is, after the saga had been written down. As to the dating Schück got support from Jón Jónsson (1902) and no objection from Jón Helgason (1924: LXXXIV). But Jón Helgason was not all that convinced, that the chronicle was a late addition to the saga: In the contrary, he called it more likely that this section had been worked out earlier than the saga itself. So as far as I can see, there is no serious objection to the possibility, that the saga itself

and the genealogy were written down for the first time or combined with each other at about 1120. And that is precisely what I hold they were. King Philippus had a wife, mentioned together with him, who may have wanted it: Philippus átti Ingigerði dóttur Haralds konungs Sigurdarsonar; var hann skamma stund konungr. This Ingigerðr was the only child still alive, which Harald the Hardruler had together with Ellisif, the princess from Kiev. Ingigerðr the daughter of Harald and thus a niece of Olaf the Saint had been queen of Denmark for some years and had right now lost her second husband, King Philippus of Sweden. Ingigerðr, the granddaughter of Yaroslav, was at the same time the most distinguished relative, whom the unusually noble and proficient present ruler of Kiev, Vladimir Monomach (d.1125) had in the far North. In my opinion there was hardly any person in Sweden at that time, more likely to want Hervarar saga ok Heidreks konungs told in a worthy way than Ingigerðr - and I guess she was willing to pay well for it.

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